

## Policy on Public Internet Sites

The following is a policy statement from the Communications Committee of the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.

In response to the growing proliferation of internet-based public social networking and information sites, this policy has been drawn to offer local churches and their committees, boards and agencies guidance and direction. Although usage varies considerably from web sites to My Space to Facebook to Twitter to YouTube to whatever-technology-is-next, the principles are the same.

1. Local churches are urged to make use of the technologies available. They are very efficient information dissemination and interpersonal networking tools. An entire generation has adopted these methodologies and uses them as comfortably as previous generations used the telephone directory or personal letter writing.
2. There are inherent characteristics not seen before in interpersonal communication. The most important of these is that nothing on the internet should be considered private. By its very nature, everything on the internet is public. Therefore, everyone using the internet for church related activity needs to be made aware that, unlike “posting a letter” in the traditional US Mail context, everything “posted” on the internet may be read by an entire world of users, not just an intended recipient.
3. It is important that local church leadership be aware of all sites that are opened and information that is posted **in the church’s name** or under the church’s auspices. Any site opened in the church’s name must be authorized by the pastor and Chair of the Administrative Council or by Administrative Council action.
  - a. A church staff member (volunteer or paid, but nonetheless a designated representative) should be placed in charge of any site opened in the church’s name.
  - b. That designee should take responsibility for monitoring the site to be sure postings are in keeping with church policy. They should be able to monitor the site on a daily basis and be skilled in the technology adequate to remove problematic material.
  - c. The purpose of this monitoring is not to limit discussion or prevent free expression. Rather, the purpose of the monitoring is to insure that, as an arm or agency of the United Methodist Church that we adhere to the first of the three simple rules of the church...Do No Harm.
4. In the event that objectionable material is being posted in the church’s name or on a church site by a church staff person, designee or church member, it is expected that corrective action be taken by the Staff Parish Relations Committee, the pastor or the church administrative council in the manner in which any other inappropriate behavior would be dealt.
5. In the event that objectionable material is being posted in the church’s name or on a church site by an uncooperative church staff person, designee or church member or by an unknown person or persons, the pastor or authorized church staff member or officer is directed to contact the service (MySpace, FaceBook, Youtube), and identify themselves as an officer of the church and request the objectionable material be removed. The history of these sites is such that they tend to be responsive to those requests.
6. In the events that a posting is of such a nature as to be considered libelous or grievously detrimental to an individual in the church or the local church itself, the pastor or authorized church member is directed to notify the District Superintendent’s Office and the Conference Office to receive direction as to whether legal remedies can or should be pursued.